

Grace Ignored but Not Forgotten



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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to the Lord Jesus Christ for His immeasurable grace. “That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” (KJV, Ephesians 2:7)

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1 INTRODUCTION-THE GEM OF GREAT VALUE

Among the vast majority of Christians today, if questioned about their beliefs on the biblical doctrine of the grace of God, most would likely respond with a pat quotation of Ephesians 2:8-10. Sadly, many would not even get as far as an actual Bible quotation. It is also likely that, if the question were pushed a little further by additionally asking what they think that means, the conversation would probably stall and go no further.

Little in-depth appreciation is given toward this gem of great value. Though it is one of the most important Bible revelations, the doctrine of grace is treated as a common zirconium, rather than a priceless stone.

There is little doubt as to the root of this deplorable condition in the Church today. It is Satan's hate and perpetual spiritual warfare toward the doctrine the keeps multitudes in darkness about the true spiritual

riches that belong to the believer in Christ. Though this passage from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians addresses the unbeliever or unsaved it still reflects a stupor upon the minds of the saved who are simply allowing Satan to pull the wool over their eyes.

(2 Corinthians 4:3) And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.

(2 Corinthians 4:4) The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (NIV, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

This insidious hatred can be biblically traced to the Garden of Eden, and even into eternity past.

(Ephesians 1:4) For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love

(Ephesians 1:5) he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--

(Ephesians 1:6) to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

(Ephesians 1:7) In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

(Ephesians 1:8) that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,

(Ephesians 1:9) he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, (NIV, Ephesians 1:4-9)

In this incredible passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the core of God's plan of redemption takes center stage. The grace of God was the object or target of Satan's diabolical scheme toward Israel as God unfurled His grand plan for the nation through the centuries. As Israel spurned the prophets and continually sinned, God preserved them because of His faithful promise of grace, which would eventually come forth in terms of the birth of Jesus the Messiah through their earthly lineage. As a separated nation before God, they did nothing to uphold a single covenant. They were covenant breakers through and through. Though they sank into the worse forms of idolatry and spiritual debauchery, even human sacrifice, and at one point eating their children, (Ezekiel 5:10) God was still faithful to them and to the world through the birth of Jesus. In other words, though the nation was completely undeserving of the gift of Christ's birth, He was given as a gift of unmerited favor. This is obviously one of the main

reasons for God to allow a remnant to return to Judea after their captivity in Babylon, which was brought about by their unrepentant sin, in order for the prophecies of Christ's birth in Bethlehem to be fulfilled.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”(NIV, John 3:16)

“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (NIV, John 1:17)

Since Jesus was the personification of Grace, His entire ministry became ridiculed by the legalistic Jewish religious leaders. Even though they were conciliatory about some of the miracles that Jesus performed, they were continually repugnant toward the purpose and intent of His miracles, which were to primarily reveal grace toward sinners.

In the Gospels, the enmity of the Jewish religious leaders grew worse and worse until it intensified into an actual murder plot. Of course, Jesus was not murdered at all. He gave himself on the cross as a gift to us all! Yet that glorious fact does not diminish the horrible reality that the people of God had sunk so far as to desire their Messiah to be crucified, which was so contrasted in their choice to release Barabbas at Christ's trial before Pontius Pilate.

The spirit of animosity was no less demonstrated by the same religious crowd as the apostles of Christ

began the process of spreading the Good News of Christ's redemptive plan and resurrection throughout the world. Christ's victory over sin and death was sure, yet Satan continued his systematic threats toward anyone who dared believe on or propagate the Good News of God's grace.

(1 Peter 5:8) Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

(1 Peter 5:9) Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

(1 Peter 5:10) And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. (NIV, 1 Peter 5:8-10)

As testified by Christ and the apostles, this hatred would continue until the end of this age when God will judge Israel and the wicked world system. Church history also testifies against the hatred of God's grace. Many believers are unaware that the Bible also teaches of a false religious system which claims the name of Christ but in reality has no spiritual connection to

Him whatsoever. A multitude of false believers claim to be followers of Christ but are not born-again. They are not born of the Spirit of God; therefore, they are none of His. “You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.” (NIV, Romans 8:9)

Satan inspires false believers within the confines of a pseudo professing church, to turn on, sometimes violently on true believers. “At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.” (NIV, Galatians 4:29)

At the core of a Spirit filled believer's life is a deep, abiding understanding and growing appreciation toward the grace of God. It is from this wellspring that true praise and service comes forth toward God. It is this appreciation that is the target of religious-ites today. They are the servants of Satan. Though Spirit filled believers are usually initially welcome within their ranks and circles in many churches, it doesn't usually take long for the warm welcome to turn into ice-water. The modern-day Pharisee is no less a servant of Satan than he was two thousand years ago. The game plan is still the same and unchanged. It is to thwart, if possible, the glorious grace of God, and all who hold to its soul-saving truth. The bone-chilling glare of the modern-day Pharisee is still just as accusatory as it was when the Lord walked the earth and the apostles spread the Good News of His resurrection. No matter how much they claim the precepts of Christianity, they do not possess the

substance who is the Lord. They hate Him, and if Christ lives in you they hate you too!

(John 15:16) You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit--fruit that will last--and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

(John 15:17) This is my command: Love each other.

(John 15:18) "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

(John 15:19) If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

(John 15:20) Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

(John 15:21) They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.

(John 15:22) If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.

(John 15:23) Whoever hates me
hates my Father as well.

(John 15:24) If I had not done
among them the works no one
else did, they would not be
guilty of sin. As it is, they have
seen, and yet they have hated
both me and my Father.

(John 15:25) But this is to fulfill
what is written in their Law:

"They hated me without reason.

(NIV, John 15:16-25)

Recently, on an episode of the travelling antique show, a man had a painting appraised at almost five hundred thousand dollars. The painting had been hanging in the hallway of his house for nearly thirty years. It was probably worth more than his house. Yet, that painting hung in the hallway for nearly thirty years without a due appreciation for its value. Just think of how many times he had walked by that treasure trove without any recognition of its worth at all.

Unfortunately, the doctrine of grace has suffered a similar fate in the vast majority of believers in the life of the Church which is the body of Christ. Grace is rarely discussed from the pulpit. If it is mentioned, it is often treated as an addition to a pile of legalism, similar to a little salt and pepper on a mountain of mashed potatoes; just enough is added to give things a good taste.

Grace is undoubtedly the most under-valued possession of the believer today. What a sad and tragic state of affairs! Therefore, the purpose of this writing will be to examine a few common misnomers that are held fervently by a wide audience of believers concerning this all important doctrine. It shall be determined that no matter how many people hold to these erroneous views which carry such an important spiritual magnitude, the truth of the Word of God shall endure forever and overrule all falsehood concerning these and any other pertinent issue. Either these views are false or they are true. There is nothing in between, and great numbers of people holding to a view has nothing to do with the legitimacy of that view. "Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge." (NIV, Romans 3:4)

First, we shall examine three areas of common thought that leads untold multitudes into wide areas of false teaching and misguided instruction which concerns the Christian faith and the life of the Church. These three areas will be coined as *what grace is not*. This will be followed by some of the major biblical passages that present the theological basis of the true revelation of the doctrine of grace, which shall be coined *the truth about grace*.

Throughout, it shall never leave the author's mind and heart, that due to the overwhelming spiritual warfare waged against the propagation of the truth concerning the grace of God, you the reader are subject and possibly under demonic attack which seeks to implement incredible schemes to keep you in

the dark. Therefore it is with fervent prayer and a dependence on the Lord that I lean on Him for His righteous might toward the effectiveness of these humble thoughts which are herein set to text. The warfare I wage is not carnal but spiritual. I do not take lightly the significance of the reader venturing through this document. Though the child of God is inseparably a child of grace, endowed with untold riches of God's grace for all eternity, it will remain for the time that Satan, who being the archenemy of God and your soul, to continually attempt to make every true believer amount to a pile of poverty and to continue to hold multitudes prisoner of sin.

It is these false claims that one stroke of God's glorious truth from His Word and empowered by His Holy Spirit, shall dispel and send to the abyss forever, along with the Devil and his cohorts.

2 GRACE IS NOT A SECOND CHANCE!

Throughout the present-day milieu of Christianity, there is an ever-growing sense that the Christian life is somehow viewed as a second chance. Though not always clearly defined, it is existentially presented to the believer's mind that the Gospel is a second chance to restore a life that has been ruined by sin. You know, though you, by your own will and bad choices ruined your life, God is still going to give you a second chance to get it right. This second chance, so to speak, will be actuated through your devotion and service as a Christian through faith.

To put it mildly, this is the biggest bunch of bologna out there. The men who preach this unbiblical nonsense are sausage sellers not preachers of the Gospel. Yet millions of unsuspecting people listen to this stuff and believe it as well. This false set of assumptions cut to the core and militates intensely against the Gospel itself. Therefore it is best to address these false views through the Scripture

passages directly. “But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” (NIV, Jude 1:9)

“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.” (NIV, Ecclesiastes 1:9) Every heresy that assaults the truth of the Gospel has its roots in ancient lies, even the father of lies who is the Devil. “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (NIV, John 8:44)

The Gospel is not a *chance* at all! Chance infers that there is something that people can do to deserve grace in some way, similar to one, two, three strikes and you're out. Contrarily, maybe we could switch this scenario the other way around, and think of ourselves as having the ability to hit some sort of spiritual home run that would really impress other people or maybe even get God's attention. As ridiculous as this may sound there are many churches under this type of misguided thinking. This is ridiculous thinking because grace means undeserved favor. Paul said in Romans, “and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (NIV, Romans 3:24) When God approached Adam and Eve after they had sinned, He was not giving mankind a second chance. He was setting into motion the only possible answer for sin

which is the grace of God. Theoretically, God could have given man a million chances, and he would have failed every time. God could have given mankind a million turns up to bat, and humanity would have struck out a million times. That is why the only feasible answer for man's sin was set forth in Genesis chapter three. It is here that the Scripture first reveals God's plan to send a Savior to redeem mankind and to defeat the Devil. It is also here that the cost of this plan is sketched out. It would cost God the death of His Son Jesus to carry the plan of redemption out to completion. "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (NIV, Genesis 3:15)

John said in his Gospel, "Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given." (NIV, John 1:16) Paul also punched a hole through the wall of legalism with this statement in Colossians, "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:" (NIV, Colossians 2:10)

Therefore, how complete is complete? If complete means nothing more can be added to our salvation, then why are so many people trying to do just that? At this point we need to sit down and do a little thinking. Completion is the key word in this thought. "When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "**It is finished**" With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." (NIV, John 19:30) So, how finished is finished?

To comprehend all that encompasses the height, width and depth of the love of God through the finished work of Christ on Calvary would take more than one lifetime to record, if possible at all. Unfortunately and sadly, the magnitude of the colossal achievement through Christ's redemptive work on the cross is often diminished to a handful of human responses toward God in terms of Christian service. No wonder there is such a sense of incompleteness throughout the Church. Human response toward God could never be enough to fulfill God's righteous demands or man's spiritual depravity. However, this wrongful mentality has created a constant need to preach an acquisition gospel to accompany this sense of incompleteness. We must acquire something from God. The totality of all such gospels is no gospel at all. All who have yielded their pulpit to this perverted message are standing within the realm of the double *anathema* (curse) from God toward its falsehood. Paul commented about how easily the Galatian believers were persuaded by these false teachers. "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel" (NIV, Galatians 1:6)

The Scripture is explicitly clear that all our works are as filthy rags. The prophet Isaiah said, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away." Saint Paul also said, "As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one. (NIV, Romans 3:10) Yet we believers are called and ordained to do good works.

Paul said in Ephesians, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (NIV, Ephesians 2:10) When examined carefully, we will see that these good works are actually God working through us toward others, not us working toward others in order to impress God. The believer is actually God’s special work of art. He is shaping us into His image all by grace, and there is no possible way that this divine project will cease until it is finished in a dynamic sense within each believer’s life. “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ” (NIV, Philippians 1:6) If there was the slightest chance that this might not happen Romans 8:29 would become an illegitimate statement. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (NIV, Romans 8:29)

The Scripture is boldfaced in that it announces and proclaims the glorious grace of God to humanity. It also demands the only avenue by which mankind can experience God’s permanent and everlasting grace, which is through simple faith in Christ alone for salvation, plus nothing. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and

forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. (NIV, Isaiah 9:6-7) In this astounding announcement in Isaiah the Christ child becomes the centerpiece of all God's redemptive plan and stability for a lost and dying humanity. He becomes the stability that cannot shift to the left or right as they do in human relationships. All the crooked ways will become straight.

Therefore we must ask the pertinent question; to whose shoulders does the governing principal of Christian relationships rest on? So Paul commented to the Corinthians concerning his conduct and relationship with them, "Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace."(NIV, 2 Corinthians 1:12) Paul understood that his relationship with others depended on the grace of God. Paul understood that the incarnation which began with the weakness of a child was actually God's wisdom and strength through grace. "And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him." (NIV, Luke 2:40) They rest on the same shoulders that grew from a child to a man and carried the weight of the sin of the world down the way of suffering, all the way until he uttered the words "**It is finished.**"

Yet there is a miserable obstinacy that continues to persist, even though all who trust in Christ for salvation are complete in Him in terms of righteousness. There is still a lingering tone from the pulpit everywhere with a resonance of desperate

incompleteness. This all sort of spirals downward to a type of thinking that reflects an attitude that one can fail grace. If we could fail grace, we could also deserve it or succeed at grace on some level. This is scripturally preposterous. Not only is this not scripturally possible, but on a practical basis, this form of thinking creates a very unstable platform by which to form relationships with other people. This could possibly point to at least part of the reason for so many churches struggling within in terms of circular relationships between members. This means in certain terms that they do not understand the grace of God between themselves and God, nor do they understand the grace of God between themselves and others.

At this point many people scream bloody murder and quote the passage from Galatians 5:4 and claim that a believer can fall from grace. Simply read the passage in context. “You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” (NIV, Galatians 5:4) Of course, these same people fail to recognize that Paul was warning Christians about the dangers of departing from the true doctrine of grace by mixing grace and the law principle together. Therefore, also at this point we need to ask ourselves how many people in the Church are doing just that, falling from grace, or departing from the biblical doctrine of grace by mixing it with the law principle? If answered honestly, a huge portion of the Church has fallen from the true doctrine of grace. Do we also fail to see that Paul said in the same book? “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained

through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (NIV, Galatians 2:21)

Therefore there is only one thing that stands between you and other believers. It is the same thing that stands between you and God, which the righteousness of God afforded by the finished work of Christ on the cross. Yet let us go even deeper than that. Let's get gut level. How did God want Paul to view other people, I mean people of all walks of life, not just other believers?

(2 Corinthians 5:12) We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart.

(2 Corinthians 5:13) If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

(2 Corinthians 5:14) For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

(2 Corinthians 5:15) And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for

themselves but for him who
died for them and was raised
again.

(2 Corinthians 5:16) So from
now on we regard no one
from a worldly point of view.
Though we once regarded
Christ in this way, we do so no
longer.

(2 Corinthians 5:17)
Therefore, if anyone is in
Christ, the new creation has
come: The old has gone, the
new is here! (NIV, 2
Corinthians 5:12-17)

The verdict is clear! With one resounding voice the Scripture declares that God was in Christ and was in fact God Himself, who died on a cross for the entire world. Thus He placed the essential value of Himself, that is His holiness and all that encompasses God's righteousness and judgments upon the wrecked and sin ravaged world of men, which is only left to be received through simple faith in Christ alone. What more can be done? Nothing, because it is finished!

Yet every Church I have ever walked into is busy up to their necks, trying to finish something that is already done. The pastors of these churches are constantly advising people that the many reasons for the spiritual ills that people are experiencing is because they have not done one or more particulars on a common list of spiritual chores. For example, it

is commonly advised to people that the reason that they are feeling unrest is because they have not prayed enough. They do not stop to think about the fact the Holy Spirit is praying for us at all times because we don't even know what to pray exactly to bring about the will of God. You see, if left in our laps, we will always feel empty and a need to strive; but when seen in the light of biblical truth we are delivered from self and find rest in the provision of Christ forever. This also raises the level and core purpose of prayer as well. This elevates prayer into the person of Christ where it belongs, and not centered on a list of acquisitions before God. Remember that all our needs are met before we ask; for our deepest need is met in the person of Christ. Paul said in Romans, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans." (NIV, Romans 8:26) Yet everywhere there is an unnecessary urgency for the believer to develop a prayer life that will somehow reflect their spiritual growth, and unless they reach this water mark of growth there will be a sense of spiritual deficit. At this point we need to ask. How could there be a spiritual deficit in something that is complete? In other words, how can something that is eternally complete be lacking in anything? The answer is found in who and what your eyes are fixed on. If they are fixed on you there will always be a sense of incompleteness. If they are fixed on Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, we will find that there remains a rest for the children of God. So let us enter that rest through faith in the only source that can truly provide complete rest from all our works. "Now we who have believed enter that

rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest." And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world." (NIV, Hebrews 4:3) This unfortunate state can only be achieved by those who have not trusted Christ for salvation.

So you see we do not have the grace of God as a chance to grow. We have it as a gift to grow within. Peter said, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! (NIV, 2 Peter 3:18) A gift and a chance are completely two different things. God isn't taking a chance on us either. Can you imagine where we would be if God was taking a chance on Peter to be faithful at Christ's arrest and trial?

He has a definite eternal plan to save people. He has not left this hanging in the wind and dependent on the whims of the sinful flesh of man. If you are saved, you did nothing to contribute to salvation whatsoever. Paul said in Ephesians, "He made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. (NIV, Ephesians 2:5) Salvation is of the Lord! "But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, "Salvation comes from the LORD." (NIV, Jonah 2:9)

If you are not saved, I sympathize with your confusion. It is truly unfortunate that such a mixed bag of messages have been delivered to the unsaved from the pulpit. The best thing to do at this point is to simply state what the Scripture claims about sin

and the grace of God. Many people have been instructed that God is recognizing some level of moral authority throughout humanity. It is a common belief that if people obey the Ten Commandments from Exodus chapter 20 they will somehow squeak by God's judgments for sin and be accepted by Him. However Paul said in Romans, "Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: (NIV, Romans 5:20)

You see, the only offer that God is extending to man is grace, not a chance to do better. So if the only valid relationship available between God and human beings or between human beings and other human beings is grace, then how much of this that is experienced by people between each other is actually illegitimate or fraudulent? The answer must be a great deal, even in the Church. This is especially painful and hypocritical in the relationships between believers because Christ gave His life on the cross that we would be clean and have fellowship with the Father and with one another. John said in the face of Gnostic heresy, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. (NIV, 1 John 1:3)

At this point this discussion must grind to a deeper level. Why is the spirit of insulting the grace of God so prevalent throughout the Church? Part of the reason must be seen in apostasy. However apostasy was often fueled by false teachers in the Scripture. There is no doubt; we are surrounded by the business of Christianity. I mean that Christianity in our culture

is a huge business, and many of the men who hold influential positions in it have worked their way there in a similar way that men in the corporate world do. It is outrageous, yet it very much exists. Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (NIV, Matthew 7:15) These phonies want people to patronize them. They want people to think that they are spiritual successes. They perpetuate a false system of spiritual-haves and have-nots throughout the Church. They want people to think that they possess something that others don't have and probably will never get. This is nonsense! Every believer without discrimination possesses the same promises of God. God does not show partiality toward men. Remember that we are essentially children of promise by faith in Jesus Christ; God cannot renege on His promise. When confronting the legalizers within the ranks of the Roman Church Paul said, “Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring--not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.” (NIV, Romans 4:16)

One of the clear reasons for so many people falling into these clever traps in our culture is Americans like and trust big institutions, the bigger the better. In other words, as long as a Church has a big building, large parking lot, and lots of programs this somehow serves to legitimize it all. There is no Scriptural foundation or basis for this reasoning, and most that

choose this unfortunate path find themselves swimming in a pool of legalistic quicksand.

My strong advice is to get away from these men. They may be geniuses at Christian marketing with successful book sales under their belts. Some of these men have hundreds, even thousands of people in their Churches. It doesn't matter, they are still frauds and you need to get away from them as soon as possible.

Draw nigh to the Lord. He is waiting there for you to meet with Him alone by faith. He is full of truth and grace, and is the only foundation, unshakable and secure forever that spiritually bankrupt humans will ever need. Though the devil will continue to cast doubt in the minds of millions toward the faithfulness of the Lord's grace, I will find refuge in the might of God's Word knowing that His grace cannot fail, "Not a chance"!

3 GRACE IS NOT A PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE!

Have you taken a casual tour of the local Christian book store lately? If you are a conservative Bible believer you will find the experience rather eyebrow rising. The shelves are oozing with psychological glop. One book after the other is presenting Christ and His Gospel as an emotional appeal. There are lots of two-step, three-step and ten step programs presented within the pages of these books about how to become this or that in Christ. The packaging and marketing of the plethora of these products is amazing. Though many Churches are following this trend wholesale, we need to have a hardy and healthy *Not So Fast* cautious approach about this movement.

First of all, did God create mankind with a psyche? Of course He did! Unquestionably, mankind was created with a psyche or mind. Mankind is gifted with emotional, reasoning and logical rationale. However that does not mean that the Gospel of grace is primarily a psychological or emotional appeal. Nor

does the Word of God encourage the believer to base his or her personal spiritual growth on such an appeal either. In the present Church milieu psychological persuasion often equates to mental manipulation, and not genuine spiritual Christ-centered growth. Sometimes this process makes people feel good, sometimes it makes people feel bad and sometimes people do not experience much of a feeling at all. Simply put, feelings cannot nor should not be equated to spiritual growth or a genuine spirituality. “Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. “But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.” (ESV, 2 Corinthians 4:-2)

Therefore, our attention will focus on the main attributes of these erroneous modes of spiritual atmosphere within the Church today. We need to ask some fundamental questions concerning these issues up front. First, what is the source of this feeling-based spirituality in the Church? Second, is it biblical? Third, does it produce lasting Christ-likeness in the believer? Fourth, does it lead to further spiritual problems in the believer and the local congregation?

Let's begin with the first question. What is the source of this feeling-based spirituality in the Church? There is no doubt multiple contributors to this rather complex problem. However, in my mind the problem is nothing new. The Bible addresses this in many instances, but the case within the Corinthian Church stands out in my mind explicitly. People came into the

Corinthian Church from various pagan backgrounds. They brought with them much of the luggage from their previous polytheistic religions. In the case of the Corinthian Church this included numerous false notions about spiritual gifts, sinful sexuality and spiritual authority. These false beliefs became false practices as well. Without going into a complete dissertation on the problems of the Corinthian Church, it will suffice to note that they had clearly developed an unbiblical hyper-spirituality (thinking themselves to be spiritual when they were really not) that clearly was not healthy.

That is just the point. They were to some degree very unbiblical. Though Paul reprimanded their unbiblical practices and beliefs numerous times throughout his two letters to them he never said that they were unsaved. Therefore it can be safely realized that hyper-spirituality is developed because believers are often unbiblical. More specifically, they are often unschooled in doctrine. This unfortunate state leave believers void of a genuine inner life built upon solid Bible teaching or doctrine. Similar to the Corinthian Church, genuine spirituality based upon solid Bible teaching is then replaced by fallacious feelings and emotions. Of course these fallacious feelings and emotions are usually induced through poor or even false hermeneutics or exegesis from the Bible. Therefore the simple claim of the Bible is not enough. The Bible must be interpreted correctly to produce true spiritual fruit in Christ.

One of the central characteristics or fruits of false teaching is the lack of soundness of mind in the people that have heard and believed it. At this point

let's take a look at what Paul said to young Timothy concerning this all important issue. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (KJV, 2 Timothy 1:7) In this powerful passage from Paul's second letter to Timothy, he contrasted one negative state of mind against three powerful and positive states of mind.

Fear is the negative state that Paul mentioned in this verse. Why did he point out fear? What is it about fear that is so destructive and destabilizing in the believer? How is it juxtaposed to power, love and a sound mind in the believer? The apostle John said, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." (KJV, 1 John 4:18)

The misapprehension of the true doctrine of grace has left a multitude of believers hanging in an uncertain relationship with a swinging gate where they don't know whether they are coming or going. This in turn denigrates the true love of God based upon His eternal grace into a He loves me, He loves me not relationship. With some, this can go as far as being saved and unsaved numerous times. More often this sin centeredness becomes a dualistic mentality which fluctuates in a swinging gate of being on or off with God on a daily basis, and sometimes this is styled as being in the Spirit or in the flesh as a behavioral based experience and state of spirituality for the believer. No matter what one calls it, this unbiblical position leaves the believer inordinately dependent on the affirmation of others, often Church leaders, for their salvation and security as a believer rather than on a personal relationship with Christ. This unfortunate

condition inevitably turns into a happy or unhappy based faith which is largely existential in nature instead of a Scripture based spirituality. This extremely common and unfortunate set of circumstances is largely caused by the deficit that is created within the heart due to an unresolved mindset and misapprehension concerning the doctrine of sin. The confusion over this subject is profound! There have been numerous theological systems developed throughout the centuries that have attempted to resolve or deal with this. However all of these systems seem to perpetuate the problem in a cyclic fashion, which never really brings things to a resolution. Sacerdotal systems and theological systems that profess confession of sin (telling God your sins) in various ways never really bring the issue to a complete resolution. Even though these systems were devised by men and extrapolated from Scripture, they are scant in the pages of the Bible. Most of them are built on a few verses of Scripture that are not contextually in Scripture, and are not representative of where modern practices as presented to modern practicing Christians should be.

The finished work of Jesus Christ is kept from the masses of believers. It is the only true and vital teaching that represents all that Christ did for the sinner. But if believers ignore the bold facts that the Scripture states about these important issues they will continue down the dismal path of uncertainty. The preachers that they listen to are all very certain about their uncertainty!

This condition has found a spawning ground even in many otherwise biblically sound churches. In short,

where there is uncertainty about the clear biblical resolution concerning sin there will be a necessity to inflate a false spirituality to take the place of the security that only the true grace of God revealed in the text of Scripture and the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer can produce through faith alone in Christ. Hence, believers commence with works rooted in the flesh to take up the slack. This is a poor excuse for spirituality and is even a type of bewitchment as stated in the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

(Galatians 3:1) O foolish
Galatians! Who has bewitched
you? It was before your eyes
that Jesus Christ was publicly
portrayed as crucified

(Galatians 3:2) Let me ask you
only this: Did you receive the
Spirit by works of the law or
by hearing with faith?

(Galatians 3:3) Are you so
foolish? Having begun by the
Spirit, are you now being
perfected by the flesh?

(Galatians 3:4) Did you suffer
so many things in vain—if
indeed it was in vain?

(Galatians 3:5) Does he who
supplies the Spirit to you and
works miracles among you do

so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—

(Galatians 3:6) just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"?

(Galatians 3:7) Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

(Galatians 3:8) And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

(Galatians 3:9) So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

(Galatians 3:10) For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

(Galatians 3:11) Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for

"The righteous shall live by faith."

(Galatians 3:12) But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."

(Galatians 3:13) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—

(Galatians 3:14) so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

(Galatians 3:15) To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified.

(Galatians 3:16) Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many,

but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

(Galatians 3:17) This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.

(Galatians 3:18) For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

(Galatians 3:19) Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.

(Galatians 3:20) Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

(Galatians 3:21) Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.

(Galatians 3:22) But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

(Galatians 3:23) Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

(Galatians 3:24) So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

(Galatians 3:25) But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

(Galatians 3:26) for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

(Galatians 3:27) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

(ESV, Galatians 3:1-27)

Paul reprimanded the Galatian believers for listening and practicing the nonsense that was preached to them by men of false spiritual authority. Their Gospel was no Gospel at all and was under a double condemnation from

God. The Scripture states emphatically that it is impossible for a believer to not be in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit abides in the believer for all eternity. The believer is eternally sealed by the Spirit of God. “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (ESV, Ephesians 4:30) You see, though it is possible to do things or have an attitude that can grieve God’s Spirit, it is not possible for the believer to do those things outside of God’s Spirit. The Holy Spirit may not be in agreement with all that we do and say, but He is with us through all that we do and say. It is the great work of salvation that makes this spectacular reality true.

There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ. Among various truths about this statement, there is an irrefutable love commended toward the believer through the shed blood of Christ. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” (ESV, Romans 8:1-2) Therefore it is not possible for God to hate or even un-love a believer. “And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (ESV, Romans 5:5) However the most common form of emotionalism in the Church is based on the bad feeling produced psychologically when the believer is told that they have sinned and that is why things are not going well in their lives spiritually, physically,

financially or in their situation. This is poor ministry at best. Though some of the reasons for this form of ministry can be sustained superficially, they do not last long or survive a true acid test in the body of scriptural counsel. This path most often spirals into a world of flimsy excuses and un-scriptural extortions.

Unfortunately millions of believers are held captive to this form of unbiblical teaching. It can do real long-term damage to the unsuspecting believer. So how should a believer think of his or her relationship to sin? Paul addressed this in certain terms in the sixth chapter of Romans. “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (ESV, Romans 6:11) Since Paul was not referencing the behavior of believers in this verse, but rather their position in Christ, it is a pretext reading of it to do so.

It is evident that God has accomplished things through His finished work on the cross of Christ that go far beyond human behavior, even that of a saved individual. The grandiose work of salvation in Christ erupts through the shallow soil of emotions and goes to the heart of man where the real problem exists. No swinging gate can accomplish this; only the true finished work of Christ can do it.

Fundamentally, humanity became separated from God through sin in the Garden of Eden. The first perverted feelings that invaded the psyche of fallen humanity were guilt, fear and shame. From that point on humanity became a soulish and self-conscious creature guided by his own impulses and emotions, instead of the objective provision of the presence of

God in the Garden. They hid in shame, fear and guilt, and immediately began their own plan of redemption by covering themselves with fig leaves. Fig leaves, religion or anything else could not undo the damage that was caused by sin. Only the shed blood of Christ could undo that! And that is exactly what it did for the sins of the entire world, which is efficacious when the lost sinner believes on Christ alone for salvation. The *alone* part of that statement means that we cannot add anything to the finished work of Jesus Christ which was accomplished through the sufferings in His death on the cross. He saved us while we were yet sinners. (ESV, Romans 5:8) “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This took place when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, not when we were trying to please God. The Bible concludes that all our works are as filthy rags.

(Ephesians 2:1) And you were
dead in the trespasses and sins

(Ephesians 2:2) in which you
once walked, following the
course of this world, following
the prince of the power of the
air, the spirit that is now at
work in the sons of
disobedience—

(Ephesians 2:3) among whom
we all once lived in the
passions of our flesh, carrying
out the desires of the body
and the mind, and were by

nature children of wrath, like
the rest of mankind.

(Ephesians 2:4) But God,
being rich in mercy, because
of the great love with which
he loved us,

(Ephesians 2:5) even when we
were dead in our trespasses,
made us alive together with
Christ—by grace you have
been saved—

(Ephesians 2:6) and raised us
up with him and seated us
with him in the heavenly
places in Christ Jesus,

(Ephesians 2:7) so that in the
coming ages he might show
the immeasurable riches of his
grace in kindness toward us in
Christ Jesus. (ESV, Ephesians
2:1-7)

Christ victoriously conquered our guilt, shame and fear on Calvary's cross. He has given us a new life in Him, which is based on His person, righteousness and strength, not ours. Notice that last verse from the passage above. It emphasizes the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. This glorious Gospel has been reduced to the shambles of our wretched relationships with each other. Our relationships with each other might be in

shambles but God's relationship with us is not. We did not build our relationship with Him; He built a relationship with us!

Many have created an impasse concerning the fellowship of believers and the believer's relationship with God. They claim that the one cannot exist without the other. There should be no misunderstanding here. They both exist as vital doctrines in the Scripture. However, this is a little like saying, if all of the church buildings on earth were burnt to the ground there would be no church on earth any longer. This is misplaced thinking because it fails to properly recognize who and what the Church is. Therefore, if you lost every Christian friend you have, would you still have a relationship with God? The answer is yes! Some of the most important biblical figures spent years in relative solitude and suffering. The apostle Paul and Joseph, the son of Israel both spent years in solitude and suffering. Did that make them not right with God, because they were not part of a spiritual social gathering on a weekly basis? It did not! These men had something deeper than that going on in their lives. These men did not always understand their situations, but they did have a profound conviction about whom and what they were. Do you? We all should, and it is a shame that so many believers have squandered their time on earth playing silly games with superficial relationships with other believers. Paul said, "I am what I am by the grace of God. "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect."(NIV, 1 Corinthians 15:10) That is all any of us are. That is really the only true common

ground between each of us. True spiritual leaders are not above others. They are simply men who are planted on the solid ground of who Christ is for them, and are able by His grace to show others that pathway to follow Christ in life.

This is rare in the spongy emotionalism of the Church today. Real men, setting forth real steps of faith is a rare commodity these days. Many today call faith the ability to do something such as build a new church building when given a grand opportunity to do so. This is not biblical faith! The great examples of biblical faith had more to do with losing than gaining, such as Abraham placing his beloved son on the altar. Certainly, Jesus sacrificing all that he was on the cross is the greatest example of faith in the Scripture. Do the latest books on spiritual growth teach this or do they emphasize group acceptance along with a bucket load of me, myself and I. Do not misunderstand me; there is nothing wrong with group acceptance in and of itself. However, it is a far shot from there to self-sacrificing biblical trust in God. Many of the great men of faith in the Old Testament had no friends at all. They just had to trust God and that was all. Job had friends, until they all turned on him. Yet he trusted God through all of His sufferings. Do you? Alienation and suffering often accompanied these men of faith every where they went. Like an ominous shadow, it followed them through every valley that they walked through. Yet these men knew who they had trusted. Even when they got confused about what He was doing in their situation, they remained steadfast with their eyes and hearts glued to the Lord. When they took their eyes off of Him the effect was

always terrible. Are your eyes on the Lord or are they infatuated with subjective nonsense? Believe me, emotionalism and subjectivity will not be able to save you or anyone else. They feel good for the moment, but are really powerless to produce one shred of genuine spirituality in Christ.

We are married to Christ, but many are dating the twin sisters who are emotionalism and subjectivity. Both sisters are born of the same mother, who is self. Jesus said, “**That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**” (ESV, John 3:6) Let’s be perfectly clear here. Fellowship and all that it implicates is an important element in a walk of faith. However, it is clearly not the only element. It is commonly taught today that almost all important growth in Christ must come from fellowship or it just won’t happen at all. This is unbiblical from beginning to end. This does not diminish the importance of loving and caring for each other’s lives. But there is a huge difference between that and being hog washed through a so called discipleship program. Some of these programs induce people to tell others all of their personal business and private spiritual matters. This is wrong and should not be practiced. Take your burdens to God. He is there for you always, and there is no risk that He will gossip your private matters to others. These programs are often highly subjective and overflowing with psychology, rather than the power of God’s Word.

The grace of God is not emotionalism or her sister subjectivity. We will need a lot more than they have to offer to get to our destination with the Lord. Cleverly hid beneath these finely packaged philosophies is the

same old Adamic nature that has been around since the fall in the Garden of Eden. There is no power or spiritual life in Adam. However, God has dealt the final blow to this horrific problem for those who believe in Christ alone for salvation. Take a good look at what the apostle Paul said about our old Adamic nature. “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. (ESV, Romans 6:6-7) Do you hear that? We are set free from sin and its penalty which is eternal separation from God. It is behooving to the situation of the believer to walk upright and completely free in Spirit, soul and body. We have been eternally liberated. Why do we continue to dwell on something that God has forever crucified? I suppose that it makes some people feel good to think that there is some hope in the fleshly nature of man, especially if one attaches a Christian label to it. Yet a turkey is a turkey, and the self is still the self no matter what label is attached to it. If one gets right down to the nuts and bolts of this, there is really not much hope in a swinging gate, psychology book or fan-dangle discipleship program. This isn’t an issue of what we like. It is an issue of God’s plan. After all, some people like pineapple ice-cream, but that does not mean it will make them whole as people or get them to heaven.

Take His hand by faith. He does not play psychological games with people. The grace of God is not a pile of psychology. The Gospel of John says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling

among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (NIV, John 1:14) This is so much more than an ever changing science such as psychology. We need something or someone that never changes. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (ESV, Hebrews 13:8)

4 GRACE IS NOT A BAROMETER WHICH CHANGES WITH THE WEATHER!

There is not a cloud in the sky, no humidity; it is a beautiful day in the seventies, and there is not a care in the world on your mind. We all might wish that every day was like the one just described. Some have even developed a fair weather theology. You know, when everything is smooth sailing and everything is going our way, then God is giving us a lot of grace. Some think conversely to the situation, thinking that when weather is bad and none of our plans are working out at all then God must not be supplying the necessary amount of grace or He is withholding it for some mysterious reason.

This poor theology is also applicable to our walk with the Lord. Since many people are bogged down with a sin-centered theology, they also think that when they are sinning more than usual they are in need of more grace to suit the situation. Consequently, the Christian walk then becomes a program to sin less than usual. This turns the grace of

God into a functional barometer, which responds to our behavior in a similar fashion that a barometer responds to high and low air pressure as the weather changes. Of course, since according to this type of theology, we are always sinners, or sinning repeatedly in some way. Therefore the grace barometer never shuts off. It is always measuring our sinfulness, activities and our relationship with God and others responding and dispensing the appropriate amount of grace that we need at any moment. You may have gotten a chuckle out of that, but sadly, it is exactly how many Christians understand the grace of God. They also apply this poor theology to everything in their lives, including their church involvement and their relationship with others both in and outside of the Church.

Therefore, at this point it is fair to ask a fundamental question to help guide our discussion. Does God's grace really increase and decrease in response to human need? Or is all of that type of thinking just more from the world of delusion that surrounds us all? Let's review what the apostle Paul had to say on the subject. The same illogical thinking existed in his day as well. People thought that grace could increase if people sinned more and became in need of more grace with the increase of their sin. Paul's response to that type of thinking was emphatic. He simply said that if we are in Christ we are dead to sin and that we cannot live in sin or go on sinning any longer. Go on sinning does not mean "acting to sin". Therefore Paul's thrust was not centered on the behavior of the believer. It was centered or focused on the position and state of the believer. The believer is now in Christ

(position) and dead (state) to sin. Just to be perfectly clear about this, this does not mean that the believer has an *opportunity* to be alive to Christ and dead to sin. It means that a spiritual transaction has taken place, and the believer is now permanently in a new position and state before God. “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (NIV, Romans 6:1-2) Many people think under a sin-consciousness that the passage means we should stop sinning because we are under grace. This type of thinking misses the force of the verse entirely. Paul said in his letter to the Colossians, “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (NIV, Colossians 1:13) The Scripture speaks of sin as a state, place, position or dominion.

(Romans 6:18) You have been
set free from sin and have
become slaves to
righteousness.

(Romans 6:19) I am using an
example from everyday life
because of your human
limitations. Just as you used to
offer yourselves as slaves to
impurity and to ever-
increasing wickedness, so now
offer yourselves as slaves to
righteousness leading to
holiness.

(Romans 6:20) When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. (NIV, Romans 6:18-20)

In the glorious passage above from Romans 6 Paul was not instructing Christians on how to get out of sin through living holier or less sinful lives. He was saying we can now live for God's holy purpose because God has set us free from sin and already made us completely holy. Also the writer to the Hebrews in the tenth chapter sates, "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (NIV, Hebrews 10:10) You see, it was God's will to make us holy. This is not an act that takes place every time we sin. There is not a sin account for the believer, short or long. There is no need to confess an account that does not exist before God. It was an act of God once for all. This incredible statement quantifies the grace of God as being for all sin for all time, made effectual to the one whom trusts Christ alone for salvation. Trust me; God did not make a mistake in the math.

Yet as true and glorious as the true finished work of Jesus Christ is, multitudes of believers have never heard this at all, even though they have been attending church for years. Many pastors simply do not understand the finished work of Jesus Christ. Many churches are legalistic and have rejected the essence of the Gospel all together. Their members are enslaved by a sin-centered mentality that Paul commanded the believer to not be yoked to. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then,

and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.” (NIV, Galatians 5:1-2) Circumcision though originally was a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham became over time the initiation rite for a Jew to become obedient to the Mosaic Law, with all its rites, rituals and ceremonies. Paul understood this probably better than any of the other apostles because he was once a teacher of the Law as a Pharisee. It was Paul who said that the letter kills but the Spirit gives life. “He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”(NIV, 2 Corinthians 3:6)

Therefore, “For sin shall have no dominion over you, because you are not under the law, but under grace” (KJV, Romans 6:14) That is what it means to be under God’s Grace! You are forever *Righteous*, forever *Saved*! Amen! So, if you think these passages are instructing the believer not to err, you are completely out of context. They are saying that the believer is dead to sin and cannot live in it any longer.

So there it is, the solid truth from God’s word. Yet multitudes of believers continue down a path with the ball and chain around their necks thinking that sin still has a hold on them. It isn’t true, no matter what they look like. God doesn’t deal with this on the basis of our looks or behavior. He has dealt with this once for all time in His son Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary for all sin for all time. Therefore, it is impossible for the grace of God to respond to human sinfulness on a barometric basis. He is not moved by

our highs and lows. He is not caught off guard by our good or bad situations. He isn't dispensing grace to us in incremental stages. His grace is the same at all times for us always.

To many people this does not make any sense. Yet the prophet Isaiah said, "For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (NIV, Isaiah 55:8-9)

So if people think of themselves as still in the bondage of sin, they carry false theology over into their relationships with others as well. For many people that have been inundated in this sin-centered mentality at church it is practically impossible to break the vicious cycle of wrong thinking. This is largely due to the investment that these folks have made in their lives through this mess. The Pharisees in the Gospels had the same problem. They placed their traditions above God's Word. They became blind guides leading the blind.

The sin-centered mentality is like a computer virus. It masquerades as a healthy program until it enters the mind and heart of the believer. Then it attaches its poison to nearly every aspect of the believers' mind and spiritual being, bogging it down with the weight of sin until it just doesn't run anymore.

So if that is you, stop it. Start reading God's Word for what it really says. It has the power to liberate you forever from all your dead works and sin-centered mentality. "And if by grace, then it cannot be based

on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.” (NIV, Romans 11:6) Start walking in the power of the Resurrected Christ. If you do you will probably walk right out of the front door of that musty old church you attend and never turn back. Don’t worry about it; a lot of great saints have experienced the very same thing. Stop listening to these legalistic blowhards, and start listening to the sweet voice of the Holy Spirit in your heart through God’s Word.

God often approaches on dark clouds, yet He brings healing in His wings. “He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet.” (NIV, Psalm 18:9) However now they are nail scared feet on those clouds, and the work of salvation is done. Therefore we do not approach a fiery mountain filled with fear, guilt and shame. He brings to us peace. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (NIV, John 14:27) The kind of peace the world gives is erratic, and changes with politics and the world situation. God’s peace is not like that at all. His peace is because he has given us His grace and it does not change for the believer for any reason whatsoever.

The grace that has been permanently given to us from God once for all is the same grace that should be reflected and expressed between each other as well. Quit spreading personal sin-centered legalism around to other believers and people in general like a bad cold virus through a misplaced theological mindset. Start seeing yourself the way God sees you, and then you will be able to relate to others on the same basis of unchanging grace. However, when

approaching others with a grace mentality, it should be forewarned that most believers do not understand it and there are many walls and barriers to overcome. If the people you are involved with cannot understand the grace of God communicated through simple acts in relationships, it may be necessary to move on with your life. Though pure and simple in essence, the grace of God has never been an easy thing for people to swallow. It just seems to go half way down their throat and it stops there.

We must not allow this to stop us though. We must press on to the high calling in Christ Jesus which finds its greatest expression in the grace of God.

5 THE TRUTH ABOUT GRACE

Grace is more than a theological position. Grace is a person. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (NIV, John 1:17) Grace and truth are not just principles that accompanied Christ at His first coming; they are attributes of His person. Grace and truth would have never come to earth without the incarnation. If you remove grace and truth from his birth He would not have ever been born. Every word that came from His mouth was true, and every word that He spoke was personified bodily in His person. His words and His person were inseparable. He is the only person that can genuinely lay claim to that reality. All other men do not live up to all the words that come from their mouths. Therefore every man is a liar and God is true! “God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.” (KJV, Romans 3:4)

This is why that we are always disappointed with our elected officials. We are always disappointed with our parents, siblings, school teachers and ministers as well. Jesus pointed this problem out in the gospel account below.

(Matthew 5:34) But I say unto you,
Swear not at all; neither by heaven;
for it is God's throne:

(Mat thew 5:35) Nor by the earth;
for it is his footstool: neither by
Jerusalem; for it is the city of the
great King.

(Matthew 5:36) Neither shalt thou
swear by thy head, because thou
canst not make one hair white or
black.

(Matthew 5:37) But let your
communication be, Yea, yea; Nay,
nay: for whatsoever is more than
these cometh of evil (KJV,
Matthew 5:34-37)

The Scripture teaches that grace is unmerited favor. This certainly is at the core of the Gospel. However, unmerited favor is best understood as the body of our Lord upon Cavalry's cross. Without the person of Christ on that cross there would not be salvation for anyone. "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses

unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”(KJV, 2 Corinthians 5:19)

Unfortunately the central work of salvation is often treated as an extension of God’s love (liberal theology) through Christ rather than a direct manifestation of God personally unto salvation for those who trust him through faith. Some might say that there is not much of a difference between the two perspectives, but the grace of God would lose its potency without the person of Christ behind it. It is the authority of Christ’s person that makes the Gospel the Gospel of saving power. Otherwise all you have is some fine examples of love and faith. Christ is so much more than that!

So why do people reach for psychology books, church programs, functions and a variety of other sources to find fulfillment? Part of the answer to this problem is that is what is being pushed in the Christian community today. This stuff keeps people involved. Involvement for involvement’s sake is not a good or biblical reason to continue. This problem is nothing new; it was around in the early Church in Paul’s day as well. Just listen to what he said to the Colossian believers. “Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels, dwelling in the things which he hath seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,” (RV, Colossians 2:18) Did you hear that? He said robbed! The Proverbs counsel to guard our hearts. Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. (NIV, Proverbs 4:23) Yes, we can be robbed in our heart of the prize who is Christ even at church. It happens all the time and is a common occurrence.

Paul counseled the Philippians to desire to be found in Him. “And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ--yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, (NIV, Philippians 3:9-10)

In short, to know Christ is to know grace and truth. Of course, this is through the continual flow of faith to faith and glory to glory. Any teaching less than the person of Christ is not biblical Christianity. The passage in Philippians speaks of knowing the power of His resurrection through the fellowship of his sufferings. The fellowship of His sufferings is described in Scripture as a cup. “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (NIV, 1 Corinthians 11:26)

We must not allow our hearts to be robbed of the precious value of the suffering that we go through in the name of the Lord. Don't reach for the latest book on psychology, it won't really help. It might make you feel a little better for a while, but be warned of the danger of being robbed in your heart of the prize who is Christ.

The power of Christ's resurrection is what was so prevalent in the early Church. Sadly His power has been to a great degree replaced with programs and faddish movements based on humanistic psychology and numerous other trappings. Look at what Luke

wrote in Acts about the power of grace at work in the early Church. “With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all.” (NIV, Acts 4:33) This says that grace was powerfully at work in the members of the early Church. What happened! Where did this power go? Why has the Church ignored this power? We must keep in mind that when we come together as Christians we do so because of what Christ did for us on the cross. There is no other reason for our fellowship. Therefore when we come together we drink of a cup. It is the cup of His suffering that made this possible. We should do so in remembrance of Him and the finished work of salvation that His Holy person provided for us to partake of. This is not a ceremony or ritual. It is a fellowship. This has no doubt been a confused subject in Christian's minds for centuries. The source of this confusion is not God, but the enemy of our souls, and the hater of God and all that he truly stands for.

Stephen was a man filled with the God's grace and power. He was able under God's power to perform great wonders among the people, and He was willing to suffer for it as well. Luke said in Acts, “Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.” (NIV, Acts 6:8) Satan had to come against Stephen with the full force of the Law, even unto stoning him to death. There was no way the enemy was going to just allow Stephen to carry out his ministry of grace unchallenged. The amazing part of the narrative is that Saul or Paul as latter known was

the main ringleader against the grace of God at that point. Just take a look at what the grace of God did with that man.

So if Stephen could do it then, we can do it now. Keep in mind the wonders that were performed were executed on the platform of grace. Grace is where the enabling power of God resides. Luke left us with this account of Paul and Barnabas, “So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.” (NIV, Acts 14:3) Take notice that it was the message of grace that took center stage, not the miracles. Yet the deepest miracle in all creation is the miracle of grace that transforms the sinful heart of man into the image of Christ. Paul summed up his entire life by saying that his life was really worth nothing, and that his entire goal in life could be explain in the all out effort to preach the message of grace to a lost and dying world. “However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.” (NIV, Acts 20:24)

The reigning provision of God's grace is so magnificent that it gets ignored and shoved aside. People prefer more convenient modes of conveying faith such as works. Yet it must be understood that the true power and reigning authority of the Gospel resides in God's grace and in nothing else. “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of

righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!"(NIV, Romans 5:17) Notice that the assertion of Christ's person is the central reason given. Without this none of this would be possible.

You see Christians are called to a personal relationship to Christ the Lord. Nothing can take the place of this. There is fullness in the provision of His person. He is enough to fill our spiritual lives from one end to the other. Yet people are defrauded of this prize every day. "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him," (NIV, Colossians 1:19) Our sufficiency is in Christ the Lord not our Christianity. We will never find a sufficient answer that addresses our weaknesses in anything that we do. The sufficiency of the Christian walk is the person of Christ the Lord. Paul expressed this in the deepest terms. Christ pointed out Paul's weaknesses not his strengths. "But he said to me, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." (NIV, 2 Corinthians 12:9)

Christ was the fulfillment and strength for all of the areas that Paul was lacking spiritually. He offers the same for you and me as well. It is Christ's power in grace that rests upon us as believers because of His person. Grace and truth is what we will always find in Him. This is because that is who and what He is. He is grace and truth. He is grace from eternity past to eternity future, and truth without a single faltering.

Without emotion, psychological tricks or barometric spiritual readings, Christ approached the woman at

the well in Samaria. Even though this woman's life was completely messed up from off relationships with men, Jesus did not dwell on that subject. He taught this woman that placing faith in Him was actually a form of drinking. He taught that faith in Him would bring living water that would well up from within the believer by the power of the Holy Spirit. This spiritual water would sustain and satisfy that individual forever, never needing to drink spiritually from any other source or well. There were no tricks, no deep psychology, no condemnation, no need for a group discipleship program and no need for the woman to confess all her sin before the offer would be made good. There was just a direct and loving offer based on the person of truth and grace. "Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (NIV, John 4:13)

Every program and faddish trend that does not originate from God's Spirit will lead to the need to drink again. They cannot satisfy or fulfill our deep spiritual need. This can only be satisfied by Christ and Him alone. For many people that is too simple. It does not inspire large activities at the local church. There is no fanfare about the matter. There is not much there to promote from the pulpit to get new members. It certainly isn't a rock concert with a phenomenal light show. It is just an ordinary looking Jewish traveler sitting by a well offering faith in Him to drink. In comparison to many of the gimmicks being pushed out there it is kind of boring. However

it is the only thing that can truly sustain us and fulfill our spiritual need. It is not an emotional, psychological or spiritual barometric weather change. It is just an offer of faith in Him to drink.

He is all the grace and truth we will ever really need for all of eternity. Though these offers and sideshows make big promises they pale in the end. They are all powerless to avail in the believer's spiritual warfare against Satan and all his demons. Just the simple grace of God is more powerful than all of those things combined. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." (NIV, 1 Corinthians 1:25) It is the simple Gospel, the Gospel of Christ and Him crucified that makes any difference at all in any of our lives. "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (NIV, 1 Corinthians 1:17-18) Do you hear that? We can empty the message of the Gospel of its power by humanizing it. This has been Satan's wicked strategy for centuries. When Christians place their feet on the solid truth of God's grace Satan attempts to drive them away from their confidence in it through discouragement and a host of spiritual schemes and attacks. However if believers stand their ground through patient endurance upon the ground of God's grace God will crush him beneath their feet of faith. "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you." (NIV, Romans 16:20)

The grace of God who is the person of Christ in grace and truth is our foundation upon which we build. All of our work in the Lord is because of God's work in us by grace. There is no other true Christianity. "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." (NIV, 1 Corinthians 3:10)

Paul became so aware of the grace of God that he understood that grace had been a work of God in his life from conception. "But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased" (NIV, Galatians 1:15) Do we understand that if we are saved today the work of God's grace goes all the way back to conception. Is grace really foundational to our faith? Are we finding our power to witness Christ to a lost and dying world through the strength of His grace? Have we found the unshackling power of unmerited favor and pure unwavering truth in the person of Christ? If not, we have missed the point all together.

This is not about spiritual barometers, emotions or psychology. It is about the riches of God's grace which he lavished on us in the person of Christ, who we can know and have a relationship with by faith. That is the truth about grace, and it should not be ignored or forgotten. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding," (NIV, Ephesians 1:7-8)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John was born in 1952 in a small farming community in southern Wisconsin. His parents moved to western Massachusetts when he was six months old. He received his primary education and was raised in western Massachusetts with three siblings. John holds a Master of Fine Arts from Baptist Bible College and Seminary in Clarks Summit Pennsylvania, majoring in ministry and theology. He has been married since 1980 to his wife Cynthia. They have two sons and four grandchildren. He has served Christ for over 30 years in various settings which range from pastoring to planting a home church. He has also led several in-home Bible classes along with his wife Cynthia.

John is a writer with a strong Christology and grace centered theology. He is also an accomplished musician and composer. He is a master of the classical and flamenco/Spanish guitar. He has performed before audiences from New England to Texas, and recorded his guitar artistry. John and Cynthia have a music ministry which is called Son-Rise. They record and compose their original music under their independent label Lone Gull Productions.

John and Cynthia live in South Carolina. He occupies his spare time with running, cooking, fishing and grandchildren. They continue to be deeply interested in the mission field, both local and abroad.